

The Sixth Sense ... WONDER! Cascades at Winchester Cathedral

by Sue Phillips

Photography by Sue Phillips



If you are a flower lover of a certain age, then you'll doubtless understand it when I say 'been there, got the t-shirt!' During the festival season (and I'm talking flowers not Glastonbury here!), there are a lot of flower festivals about and it can sometimes, forgive me, be a case of having seen it all before; let's do something else today! So what was it that appealed about this summer's Festival of Flowers at Winchester Cathedral? When I read that Hans Haverkamp, a Dutch Master Florist now based in the UK, was the Artistic Director and that his colleagues on the Creative Team were Bill Dixon and Pauline Hurran then some alarm bells started to ring and I thought; now *this* might be something special!





Cascades, Hans explained, are for him one of nature's most beautiful sights and it was that sense of 'wonder' in nature that he wanted to encapsulate in the festival; wonder that would take inspiration not just from 'watery' colours and flowing designs, but from Cathedral architecture and the Christian faith.

Like most cathedral festivals, the first sight visitors saw was the nave. Naves are by nature a difficult area; it's a question of balancing several factors – allowing visitor access, 'the budget' and, from the artistic perspective, creating 'the first impression' in an awe-inspiring space. Here, classical and contemporary merged in two seven-metre long s-shaped 'curtains' in varying hues of blue. An installation which soared seemingly up to the heavens, gathering within its curved form statuesque pedestals and giant bowls. The opening scene was set, it was one I returned to several times during my visit and each time the June sunlight shafted through and seemingly transformed the paracord curtains into ever-changing cascades of water. The wonder of light!

Novelist Jane Austen is buried at Winchester Cathedral and in her memory was a moss-covered chair, sweetly fragrant with the wonderful David Austin roses. The chair coincidentally drew my attention because it had been recycled from another festival (what a great idea!) and reworked in this new design.



Sometimes it's the understated that brings out that sense of wonder. A vertical tapestry in the muted shades of lavender and peach replicated the faded colourings of the fresco backdrop and ceiling as if a traveller-in-time had united craftsmen of yesteryear with those of today.

And the journey through Cascades continued through to the Sanctuary and High Altar. The installation here of transparent, crafted panels and organza ribbons accentuated with subtle placements of white Phalaenopsis, Dendrobium Orchids, and Paeonia together with Amaranthus and Panicum virgatum 'Fountain', was as if a waterfall cascaded in front of the magnificent, carved-stone screen backdrop. At its foot, a giant flower bowl of whites and green. A moment to pause, to be peaceful, to wonder and ... to WOW!

And more! Designs that said 'Look up to the sky and see', others that created a sea of blue and, something that really appealed, 'A stroll among the flowers' with the add-on of small collections of scented material saying 'Please smell the flowers'. The wonder of flowers!



And wonderful too were Southeast Flowers who supplied all those fabulous flowers and the designers from Wessex and Jersey Area of NAFAS who translated Hans, Bill and Pauline's vision for Cascades into the festival that it was. What a wonderful world!